

No Vegas glitz on Capitol Hill

Grounds get a reflecting pool, not a showy fountain

By Lisa Riley Roche

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Utah's state Capitol complex could have looked like a little bit of Las Vegas — but the price tag was too high.



Keith Johnson, Deseret Morning News

The Capitol fountain is part of the \$200 million renovation of the statehouse and its grounds. The fountain should be flowing soon but will be shut off for the winter

Plans for a fountain that would shoot water up to 40 feet into the air in a variety of patterns, accompanied by timed lights and, possibly, even a few flames, were scrapped when officials found out that extravaganza would cost \$1.4 million.

Now, the oval fountain that sits between the new East and West buildings on the grounds will provide a much more sedate show for about half the expense. Instead of "Dancing Waters," there will be a soothing trickle of water from a top tier into the bottom.

"It was going to be Vegas," said David Hart, executive director of the Capitol Preservation Board that's overseeing the \$200 million renovation of the Statehouse and its grounds, set to be completed by 2008.

The modified fountain, though, should be up and running by the end of this month. Hart said it will end up being similar to one on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' Temple Square.

"It won't compete" with the surrounding buildings, Hart said of the new design. "It'll give us a little bit of white noise, a little bit of sound." And it will serve as a reflecting pool for the Capitol and the East and West buildings.

A reflecting pool was what the original designers of the complex had in mind for the fountain. The renovation project has attempted to stay true to the original plans for the 89-year-old Capitol, even using them as a model for the East and West buildings.

But then someone drew up a rendering of the finished project with the fountain shooting spray high into the air. Hart said that got everyone involved thinking about a fancier fountain. "I think we just got carried away," he said.

Wet Designs, the company that designed some of the most spectacular water

features in Las Vegas as well as the Salt Lake Olympic legacy fountain in The Gateway, was contacted to draw up a proposal.

Fountain facts

- Holds **20,625** gallons of water
- Built with **580** pieces of black granite imported from China
- Filled with **26** tons of black Mexican beach cobble
- Pumps move **1,500** gallons per minute

Capped along outer wall with granite imported from Italy

SOURCE: Scott Carpentier, project engineer, Jacobsen Construction Co.

Deseret Morning News graphic

The state, though, had budgeted only \$700,000 for the fountain, and the choreographed water and light shows proposed by Wet Designs would have meant spending twice as much. So Hart said another company was brought in to come up with a less expensive water feature.

Long-term costs were a consideration, too, he said. Shooting sprays high into the air in Utah's desert climate meant the fountain would end up losing water much faster. Capitol Hill's winds would also have caused problems.

The fountain's finishing touches, including a black pebble bottom, are still being installed. Hart said once it's done, it will be turned on for about three weeks, then shut down for the winter.

That's because the new central plant won't be up and running in time to heat the water this winter, and a temporary solution would have added another \$20,000 to the bottom line. Next spring, though, the fountain should be turned on permanently.

Hart said he's happy with the way things worked out. "What we came up with is basically a two-tier pool," he said. The 20,625-gallon fountain will use recirculated water and feature seating around the perimeter.

"I think this will be an important feature."